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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 003655

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PARIS FOR WALLER, LONDON FOR TSOU, AMMAN FOR KANESHIRO

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM SY LE

SUBJECT: TFLE01: SYRIA DAILY SITREP 09 FOR TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2006

REF: SECSTATE 120911

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) Summary: The SARG has yet to respond to a July 25 demarche from the Charge about steps required of Syria as part of efforts to halt the Israel-Hizballah conflict. The Damascus-based UN Resident Coordinator held a meeting July 25 for diplomatic representatives of donor countries to discuss the USD 13.6 million flash appeal for Syria. He noted a SARG request that the UN inspect all aid shipments transiting Syria into Lebanon, adding that the query had been forwarded to the UN's New York headquarters for a decision. The American Citizen Services unit received 184 walk-ins July 24, consistent with the level on previous days. End Summary.

POLITICAL

12. (C) The following are political updates:

-- Charge delivered demarche points contained in reftel to Embassy's designated interlocutor at the MFA, Chief of Protocol Amir Smadi, early July 25. Smadi listened to the points, taking detailed notes, but did not react. He undertook to deliver the points immediately to senior leadership of the MFA, and promised a response during the course of the day. Thus far, no response has been conveyed.

-- Charge also formally requested to the MFA's designated interlocutor that the SARG return the uniformed police officers that had been withdrawn from the perimeter of the Chancery at the beginning of the week. Charge noted that uniformed police continue to be posted at every other diplomatic mission in Damascus. The Chief of Protocol agreed to convey Charge's concern to the appropriate authorities.

-- The UN Resident Coordinator Ali Al-Za'tari held a July 25 meeting for diplomatic representatives of donor countries, to discuss the USD 13.6 million flash appeal announced a day earlier. An estimated 150,000 people who fled Lebanon remain in Syria, and of those, an estimated 20,000 are in dire need of assistance, according to Za'tari, citing officials from the SARG and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. The SARG has formed a higher ministerial committee headed by the State Minister for the Red Crescent, Bashar al-Sha'ar, and also including the ministers for Religious Trusts and Social Affairs and Labor, but so far no one government official has served as a reliable point of contact, Za'tari said. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent is responding admirably to the crisis, but is slowly being overwhelmed, Za'tari said. If the crisis continues, the number of displaced in Syria could

soar up to 300,000, he asserted. The UN has formally approached the MFA to allow in more than 200 Palestinians stranded on the Lebanon-Syria border, but there has not been an official SARG response so far. The SARG, in turn, formally requested help in responding to the crisis and in the movement of relief items to Lebanon, Za'tari said. Additionally, Za'tari said the SARG had requested if the UN could inspect aid trucks destined for Lebanon, a query which "New York needs to decide." The ResCoord said that his office believed that Syria was a very viable overland passage for the movement of relief into Lebanon. A World Food Program representative said her organization was hoping to get a hub for humanitarian aid into Lebanon up and running within five or six days at the al-Arida crossing on Lebanon's northern border with Syria.

-- A new picture of President Bashar al-Assad with Sheikh Nasrallah and Iranian President Ahmadinejad can be seen all over Damascus, according to a PD FSN and contacts. Other banners and posters are also going up around the city, including a large billboard of a smiling Nasrallah with the words "Victory for our people in Lebanon and Palestine."

CONSULAR

13. (U) The following are consular updates:

-- The ACS unit received 184 walk-ins July 24, consistent to the level on previous days.

-- The phone volume was down considerably July 24, with most callers focused on immigrant visa petitions for Lebanese citizens.

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ECONOMIC

14. (SBU) The following are economic updates:

-- Syria's Minister of Electricity said his country would continue to provide Lebanon with 150 megawatts of electricity per day around-the-clock, to relieve suffering caused by the Israel-Hizballah conflict, according to SANA. (Comment: We understand that this level of electricity sharing has maxed out the transmission infrastructure between the two countries, and some Syrians are claiming it will cause unspecified, localized shortages in Syria.)

-- A 17-vehicle SARG humanitarian convoy crossed the Jdeideh border into Lebanon on July 24, carrying 120 tons of foods and medicine and 6,000 mattresses, according to the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). The SARG was sending aid convoys into Lebanon without coordination and was pressuring the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to do the same, according to the President of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent on July 24, adding that he had refused to send any assistance without first notifying all the belligerents.

-- The SARG held a coordination meeting with Syrian NGOs during which the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs reiterated the government's intention to allow them to operate unimpeded to confront the crisis. A private businessman complained to us that there was still no overarching government entity to coordinate between private sector and NGOs.

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